Apr 13th, 9:00 AM - 12:00 PM

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Emma Halfman
Illinois Wesleyan University

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Emma Halfman and Leah Nillas*
Educational Studies, Illinois Wesleyan University

Abstract

Independent reading is a time wherein students are allowed to read self-selected materials on their own (Yoon, 2002). Federal research like that of the National Reading Panel Report (NRP), however, has suggested that such programs in schools do not have conclusive benefits for students. Given this context, some administrators, teachers, and parents often do not advocate for independent reading in the classroom. They prefer instead that class time be spent wisely. They prefer that the class time be focused on the instruction of skills/content that matter to students and that align with state and national standards and assessments. With such emphasis placed upon student achievement in regard to state and national standards and assessments, independent reading is not given priority status in high school-level English classrooms. Knowing this information and that students' reading attitudes decline as they continue through school, I focused my self-study on the impact daily independent reading can have on high school-level students' perceptions towards reading. I focused on the ways in which I, as a teacher, could create a conducive reading environment as well. I used student work samples to examine students' perceptions toward reading and ensure that they were held accountable for reading their self-chosen books. In addition, I used student anecdotal records and field notes to observe students' behaviors, reactions, and choices during the allocated independent reading time. Through my self-study, high school-level students' perceptions towards and participation with reading is explored. This is done with the hopes of reversing the reported steady decline in reading. My self-study essentially examines and analyzes a handful of strategies teachers may employ in their own independent reading programs to help improve their high school students' perceptions and behaviors towards reading and as a means to get them to actively participate.

Keywords: *independent reading, reading attitudes, reading motivation, reading strategies,* and *high school*.

Introduction

The rate at which American students read for fun has declined per findings of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP; Schaeffer, 2021). According to a survey that the NAEP conducted from 2019 to 2020, students' reading levels were at their lowest since the 1980s–16% of the students surveyed that were age 9 said they rarely read for pleasure while 29% of those students who were age 13 said the same (Schaeffer, 2021). Though the NAEP's survey from 2019 to 2020 did not include information on the reading habits of 17-year-old students, Schaeffer (2021) noted that when such students were surveyed back in 2012, nearly 27% said that they rarely read on their own and for their pleasure. Given these survey findings, it is clear that students' independent reading habits, regardless of age, are dismal and that this phenomenon is large in scope.

This decline in reading is not without consequence, however–there are implications regarding individuals' literacy abilities. For example, the NAEP's findings highlighted that only a mere 35% of fourth-grade students were at grade level in their reading skills and that 13-year-old students' reading scores were, on average, the lowest they had been since 2004 (*Literacy*, 2022; Lonas 2023). Furthermore, it was mentioned how, when it came to reading and standardized assessments, students that performed well–meeting or exceeding the 75th percentile–happened to often read for pleasure on a daily basis (Schaeffer, 2021). In other words, students that tended to read for fun more often demonstrated a stronger grasp on literacy skills and performed better. The implications from a decline in reading are not just solely confined to literacy and achievement either; it affects society as well. Alongside affecting academics, EducationWeek (2022) states that reading skills and literacy affect the rates for school dropout, suicide, incarceration, mental health concerns, and employment. Literacy, as a whole, appears to matter in paramount ways–it is a core of society and impacts the ways in which one understands themselves and how to participate effectively within society's constructs (*Why does*, 2016).

With all that being said, this paper aims to explore the issue of high school students' declining interest in reading and whether the implementation of an independent reading program impacts their perceptions and behaviors toward the activity. It will do so through a review of past literature specifically geared towards examining students' motivation in relation to reading, what independent reading is, arguments against it and in favor of it, and, lastly, how teachers have implemented it previously into the classroom. This paper will conclude with a section analyzing data in relation to a self-study I conducted during my student teaching experience as a means of discussing how my implementation of daily independent reading time impacted students' perceptions on and behaviors with

reading and in what ways I created an environment conducive to their independent reading.

Literature Review

Reading and Its Connection to Motivation

As mentioned earlier, the NAEP discovered the rate at which American students read for fun has declined over the years (Schaeffer, 2011). According to Bintz (1993), this decline in reading interest has been particularly noticeable among junior high and high school-level students as only 3% and 2% of their respective class time is spent on reading. These findings ask the question as to why students are no longer interested in reading.

One component that impacts students' motivation to read, especially in regard to the school setting, is the lack of choice they face in the materials that they can read. Allred and Cena (2020) highlighted that many high school students' reading experiences are in relation to assigned texts that do not align with their interests and which cause them to be unmotivated. Bintz (1993), for instance, interviewed students about teacher-assigned texts and further supported these notions by noting how students were not interested in the materials, skimmed them, and barely remembered anything about them. Students that Strommen and Mates (2004) classified as "Readers" in their study demonstrated that even they do not enjoy reading assigned materials and texts by explaining that they merely scan them to complete them so they can get to reading books of their own choice. In other words, assigned materials and texts negatively affect the reading experiences of students alike, not just those who may already be deemed as passive or reluctant readers. It can be argued then that students view such reading as being in direct opposition to their legitimate interests and that their interest in *school* reading (i.e., assigned texts) declines as they get older, not necessarily that their interest in reading as a whole declines (Bintz, 1993).

With all that being said about assigned materials and reading motivation, Pitcher et al. (2007) argued that allowing students to read their preferred materials increases their motivation and the effort they expend on reading due to the fact that the activity becomes closely aligned with who they are as individuals. In their study, Allred and Cena (2020) concluded that students' reading motivation is indeed positively impacted by providing them with choice. Through student interviews, they found that many students do not want to be made to read a specific book–that the students would much rather read books that were of their own choosing (Allred and Cena, 2020). These students not only claimed that they would be more motivated to read if they knew the books that they were reading interested them and were not boring (and, in turn, hard for

them to read) but also claimed that, when actually given choice, they were more engaged (Allred and Cena, 2020). According to Allred and Cena's (2020) interviews, students tied their engagement to feeling like they had more freedom to read at their own pace and because the reading did not come across so much as an assignment rather than as a fun activity for them to partake in. In short, it can be said that assigned readings are a factor contributing to the decline in students' reading motivation and interest, and, in order to reverse these effects, students need to be provided with a choice in preferential materials.

Another component that impacts students' motivation to read is their self-concept (or, how they see themselves as readers). It is reported that students who have higher self-concepts when it comes to reading may be more motivated than those students who perceive themselves more poorly (Allred and Cena, 2020). Though Strommen and Mates (2004) interviewed students in their study and primarily recognized that reading skill did not contribute to them liking reading, they did find that a student they classified as a "Not-reader" linked his dislike of reading specifically to his poor reading skills, confirming Allred and Cena's claim. In addition to self-concepts scores, Pitcher et al. (2007) found that students often viewed reading as a school activity and, due to this, they did not classify themselves as readers depending on what they read outside of the classroom. For example, one student in their study stated that he does not like to read at all but, when interviewed, Pitcher et al. (2007) discovered that he actually read stories in magazines and that how he was defining reading did not encompass such 'untraditional' materials. Thus, this student had preconceived notions as to what reading was based on academic contexts and he did not view himself as a reader due to them, viewing his choice of reading materials as invalid forms (Pitcher et al., 2007). Essentially, when students do not see themselves as readers or do not positively associate themselves with the act of reading, they are less likely to be interested in the activity and/or engage deeply with their books.

The final component that impacts students' motivation to read is the value that they place upon the act of reading. According to Allred and Cena (2020), students who receive higher value scores on reading motivation questionnaires view reading as a worthwhile activity. In addition, it was reported that regular, avid readers view reading an enjoyable, preferred activity (Bintz, 1993). To these individuals, reading was perceived to be an activity that they could incorporate into their day-to-day life. Strommen and Mates (2004) noticed as well that the students in their study who they classified as "Readers" regarded reading as an activity worth prioritizing thanks to the people surrounding them–they recognized that reading can be a fun, meaningful, and social activity for them to engage in. Meanwhile, the "Not-readers" in their study saw it as pointless and did not place

any meaningful value on the activity (Strommen and Mates, 2004). In the end, it becomes clear that students who view reading in a positive light and who see its value and purpose in their life tend to read more regularly or be more motivated to do so.

Ultimately, when it comes to answering the question of why students are no longer interested in reading, it can be concluded that students are not necessarily uninterested in reading altogether but that they are mainly uninterested and lack motivation when reading assigned materials. Therefore, instead, they need to be given choice in what they can read so that they can be engaged with materials that align with their needs and interests. In addition, it can be concluded that students' self-concepts as readers and the value they place on reading as an activity play a role in their motivation to read as well–the better their self-concepts and views about reading, the more motivated they may be and vice versa.

Independent Reading's Main Objectives

Independent reading is an activity and practice employed by teachers in which they provide students a designated amount of time to read both individually and silently materials of their own choosing for their own pleasure (Yoon, 2002). According to Sanden (2012), the activity involves teachers providing students with choice (e.g., in reading materials and in reading setting), the ability to work at an individual pace, and the chance to interact with texts and problem solve without direct teacher guidance (though assistance is still provided when needed). "The ideal model has each reader directing his own activities with printed material throughout the duration of the reading period" (Hunt, 1971, p. 27); it is a way to demonstrate to and teach students that they can indeed read on their own for prolonged periods of time.

Through the practice of independent reading, the main objectives are to develop students' reading achievement and their reading attitudes. It is an activity implemented by teachers to help instill reading skills and habits in their students and to hopefully, in the end, transform them into lifelong readers outside of the classroom. As noted by Hunt (1971), independent reading aims to instill such skills and habits in students as extensive reading and self direction. It aims to build students' reading stamina and their abilities to appropriately select and properly navigate their chosen texts. The ultimate objective though according to Hunt (1971) is for students to come away with a love for reading–for them to develop a passion for the activity, find it personally rewarding, and make it a part of their day-to-day life.

Arguments Against Independent Reading

There are differing opinions on if independent reading is truly beneficial for students and whether it should be implemented into school classrooms. The arguments against it primarily focused on the following: independent reading's impact on students' reading attitudes and achievements; the emphasis that is put on instructional time being used wisely; students' participation in such programs; and, lastly, independent reading's impacts on struggling and reluctant readers.

A major category of argument used to advocate against the implementation of independent reading into the classroom was backed by reports and studies that demonstrated that such programs have inconclusive and/or negative impacts on students' reading attitudes and achievements. One of the major reports that did so was that of the National Reading Panel (NRP). For context, the NRP report is classified as federal research and its methodology is considered "the gold standard for scientifically based reading research" (Garan & DeVoogd, p. 336, 2008). Given these classifications, Garan and DeVoogd (2008) stated that the report has an immense amount of influence over both educational policy and what is adopted into schools by administrators and teachers despite it having been published in 2000. As stated in Fisher (2004), the NRP report was unable to draw a conclusion supporting the effectiveness of independent reading in schools; it concluded that there was not enough direct evidence to support the notion that such programs improve students' reading achievement. Many other studies alongside the NRP report further established this notion of inconclusiveness and/or negativity. For example, studies that examined independent reading's impact on word recognition and comprehension, reading attitude, and reading achievement all drew conclusions that were either equivocal or inconclusive (Wiesendanger & Birlem, 1984; Yoon, 2002; and Hairrell et al., 2010). In addition, as cited in Wiesendanger and Birlem (1998), two studies found that students participating in independent reading programs ended up presenting less positive attitudes toward reading than they did at the beginning of the program's initiation. Given the conclusions of such reports and studies (especially that of the NRP), some administrators and teachers willingly interpret and accept independent reading as having a lack of concrete benefits and therefore decide against incorporating it into their schools and classrooms. Instead, these administrators and teachers opt to focus their instructional time on strategies, methods, and concepts that are considered more effective and important.

Diving more deeply into that last point (i.e, that instructional time be used wisely), one position of the argument against independent reading was that the class time be used to meet the pressures and demands of standardized testing instead. These specific arguments suggested that teachers spend more of their time focusing their curriculum on content and skills that appear on tests so that

students' scores and performance improve. In Worthy et al.'s (1998) article, some teachers themselves even felt that there was simply not enough time to implement both independent reading into their classrooms while also meeting the demands of standardized tests. This argument was only strengthened by the perception they held that any positive impacts that independent reading has to offer may not be nearly as drastic as those that direct, explicit instruction on testing strategies and skills has within a year of schooling (Worthy et al., 1998). In addition to this aforementioned argument, others maintained a focus on what independent reading *really* functions as. For example, Worthy et al. (1998) highlighted that some administrators, teachers, and parents believed that independent reading should be used for enrichment purposes *only* rather than for primary instruction. These individuals essentially claimed that the only students allowed to read independently were those who had met and/or exceeded the requirements and standards already placed upon them. To them, struggling students did not have the time to forfeit learning concrete skills or improving in the areas in which they were underperforming so that they could read for fun instead. Rather, they needed to be using that time to solidify their content knowledge and skills. In short, these types of arguments claimed that independent reading was not an effective use of time in the classroom and that the time that would go towards a reading program would be better spent elsewhere (e.g., on test preparation, strengthening of content knowledge).

Another claim made against the implementation of independent reading programs focused on students' participation within them. As cited in Hairrell et al. (2010), less than forty percent of high school-aged students spent time during independent reading on the task at hand. They were not actually engaged with the reading that they were supposed to be doing; sometimes, such students' inattentiveness and any disruptions that occurred (e.g., talking) were due to the fact that they could not maintain focus for extended periods of time or because they simply could not find materials to read (Hairrell et al., 2010; Fisher, 2004). This lack of participation, though, was further supported by Fisher (2004) when the data she collected from twenty classrooms at an urban high school demonstrated that less than 720 of the 2,200 participating students were actually spending the time reading. Instead of reading, Krashen (2005) cited Stahl's observation of a pair of students who, although appearing to share a book, were actually not on task and instead discussing their plans for outside of school. Given this data and these observations, some individuals essentially argued that students do not engage with reading in the ways that they are supposed to during independent reading time and, with that considered, the time is not valuable and is ineffective in classrooms.

A final case made against independent reading dealt with the potential negative impacts that the allocated time had on struggling and reluctant readers. Hairrell et al. (2010) argued that independent reading was appropriate for readers with average to high reading abilities as well as those who enjoyed reading but that it was not beneficial for those students who faced difficulties. Hairrell et al. (2010) noted that these latter students often did not receive the guidance and assistance they needed in independent reading programs. For example, they faced obstacles choosing texts to read that were appropriate for their reading levels. According to Hairrell et al. (2010), such students often chose materials that their peers were reading but which did not properly align with their needs, ultimately hindering or leading to a breakdown in their motivation, interest, and reading development. In addition to this challenge with independent reading, the lack of directly assigned tasks and interactions in independent reading programs (with either the teacher or other students) was argued to have caused problems like unproductivity for struggling and independent readers (Hairrell et al., 2010). These types of students were not provided with the learning benefits that interacting with teachers and peers had and of which they needed to further develop their reading and textual skills (Hairrell et al., 2010). Essentially, the described potential negative impacts and the lack of guidance that independent reading provided for certain student identities swayed some individuals against providing a designated time for it in the classroom.

In summary, there were various arguments made against the implementation of independent reading programs into the classroom. There were arguments backed by studies that either reported that independent reading did not have conclusive benefits or that its effects are negative for students. Meanwhile, there were still other arguments that concluded that instructional time needs to be used for more worthy, effective practices and content, that students did not participate during the allocated time anyway, and that independent reading neglected struggling and reluctant readers.

Arguments in Favor of Independent Reading

In contrast to those individuals who argued against independent reading, there were those who argued in favor of its implementation in schools and the classroom. Their arguments included such reasonings as: the findings of the National Reading Panel (NRP) report being wrong; independent reading being found valuable by students; and, lastly, independent reading having positive impacts on students' reading attitudes and achievement.

Unlike those individuals who argued against independent reading based on the NRP report and its inconclusive results, those individuals who argued in favor of the implementation of independent reading did so by deeming that the

report's findings were wrong based on its methodology. In other words, these individuals argued that the report's findings were not backed by valid data and evidence (Garan and DeVoogd, 2008). Krashen (2005) was one of such individuals who called the report's findings into question due to the fact that it failed to incorporate various studies on independent reading and made grave errors with the studies it did choose to incorporate–for example, they examined subjects that were already avid readers. Garan and DeVoogd (2008) further supported these flaws in the report's methodology by noting that many studies demonstrating support for independent reading were merely excluded by the NRP because they did not meet the report's selection criteria. In particular, it was stressed that the report focused primarily on independent reading's effect through short-term studies, failing to include and examine both long-term and experimental studies–studies which had a higher chance of exhibiting positive results for the program and that actually did (Krashen, 2005). In short, individuals using this argument in support of independent reading concluded that there is indeed substantial evidence demonstrating its benefits and that the NRP report simply failed to include such studies.

Alongside the aforementioned reason, individuals also highlighted the value students placed on independent reading as support for its implementation into the classroom. These forms of arguments demonstrated that students thoroughly enjoyed the time allocated for independent reading and looked forward to it when they went to school. For example, a study cited in Fisher (2004) determined that independent reading time was favored by a high percentage–specifically 63 percent–of the nearly two-thousand middle school students who were surveyed. In addition, Fisher (2004) revealed that multiple students valued designated independent reading time since it was one of the only times where they could actually read in silence. Students explained that they could not read at home because their parents would simply not allow them to, (directing them instead to do other school work or chores) nor were they able to read in their social circles because no one else was reading (Fisher, 2004). Fisher (2004) stated that independent reading was found especially valuable for those students that did not have access either to a place to read or to materials of their own choosing outside of the classroom setting. Value of this sort from students in regard to independent reading was brought to a peak though when Worthy et al. (1998) noted the disappointed reactions from students when it was not prioritized by the teacher and when it was taken off of and/or substituted by another activity on the class agenda. Students demonstrated that they missed the activity when a specific time was not allocated. This argument in favor of independent reading was essentially illustrated and backed by students' feelings toward the activity and what they took away from it on a personal level–this form

of support demonstrated that independent reading was found valuable by students themselves.

Lastly, despite the views of the opposition, individuals that offered support for independent reading argued that independent reading does indeed have positive impacts for students in relation to their reading attitudes and achievement. Regarding the former, individuals claimed that providing time for students to read materials of their own choosing in school (as is done in independent reading) is important in getting students to view reading and their experiences with it more positively (Yoon, 2002). A study done by Yoon (2002) found clear evidence that independent reading does lead to significant increases in students' reading attitudes over time–in his study, he discovered that the average individual in his independent reading group exceeded 55% of those individuals within the control group when it came to attitude scores. Further solidifying this stance, Weisendanger and Birlem (1984) found a similar result, noting that students participating in independent reading viewed reading more positively than did those students in other types of programs. It was highlighted that these increases in students' reading attitude were more noticeable among students enrolled in third grade or below (with an effect size of 0.32) compared to those in the grades above (with an effect size of 0.06) but that increases were still present among both groups (Hairrell et al., 2010). In addition, Yoon (2002) mentioned that these increases in reading attitude were not affected by length of treatment, meaning that no significant differences could be found between shorter allocated time frames of independent reading and longer ones.

Meanwhile, regarding the latter (i.e., reading achievement), individuals argued along similar lines that providing independent reading time leads to increases in students' reading competencies. Yoon (2002), for example, discussed how students who do not read on their own time "lose academic ground" and that students who face reading difficulties but do read self-chosen materials reach higher levels of competency than if they did not. This claim was supported by Fisher (2004) in a comparison of students' reading scores–in this comparison, she found that students who were provided time to read independently on a daily basis throughout the school year had (by the end of the year) reading scores that were higher by 0.6 of a year than those students who were not given an allocated time to read. Alongside increases in reading scores, there were also other positive changes in student achievement that were recognized. Several individuals cited gains related to students' vocabulary and comprehension skills (Weisendanger & Birlem, 1984) as well as to their background knowledge and fluency, too. (Hairrell et al., 2010). In short, individuals argued that independent reading is beneficial as a classroom

structure and activity due to its abilities to develop positive reading attitudes in students' and to increase their language skills and overall achievement.

Considering these various stances altogether, a case was made for the implementation of independent reading into the classroom environment. The arguments in favor of independent reading as a practice captured the following important components: the ways in which the benefits of independent reading have been inaccurately perceived by federal researchers; how students personally valued and appreciated having a set time to read their own materials; and how independent reading positively affects students' reading attitudes and achievement across various spectrums.

Implementation of Independent Reading

Oftentimes, it seems that when people imagine a classroom with an independent reading program put into place, they picture a classroom wherein students are entirely quiet, reading their own books at their desks, with a teacher who is consistently monitoring their overall behavior. Though this may be the case for certain independent reading programs, existing educational literature suggests that there are other ways in which teachers implemented independent reading into their classes. Such programs involved the following criteria: (a) student choice; (b) attention to student needs; (c) consistent time; (d) discussion; (e) accountability measures; and (f) teacher modeling and mentoring.

In successful independent reading programs, there was major emphasis placed on allowing students choice. According to Kasten and Wilfong (2005), when students were allowed to self-select their books, they were able to engage on a deeper level with books that they cared about and of which were aligned to their unique, personal interests as individuals. Students were able to enjoy the process of reading and, in Lee's (2011) implementation, she found that her students began to view reading as a more casual activity. Furthermore, Worthy et al. (1998) even stated that self-selection led to an improvement in students' positive feelings toward reading. One teacher stated that they noticed students did better when they were provided a choice–that teacher explained that when given a novel chosen by someone else, students simply turn away from reading because of the understanding and mentality that they did not choose it (Worthy et al., 1998).

Allowing students' choice during independent reading was not solely restricted to the materials that students could read, however. It also concerned the seating arrangements and what follow-up activities students may have been required to complete once they finished reading their book. Regarding the former, in Lee's (2011) study, students were able to find and pick spots within the classroom where they were most comfortable reading–that may have been

choosing to stay at their desk, stretching out on the floor or sitting in flexible seating options (e.g., sofas, beanbags) available in the classroom. However, this choice in seating was granted as a privilege to students and could be revoked per teachers' discretion when students were not using it wisely during independent reading time (Lee, 2011). In relation to the latter (i.e., student choice in follow-up activities), Lee (2011) posted and directed students to various activity options–they provided them with opportunities to do a book talk, write a book review, create a script of a book, or read another book written by the same author among others. Students were able to choose an activity option of their own liking though and even were encouraged to come up with ideas entirely on their own as those appeared to always end up being the best (Lee, 2011).

Alongside student choice in independent reading, there was also an emphasis on meeting the needs of the various participating students as a teacher. This took the form of teachers assisting and providing students with the necessary tools to choose books on their own. For example, as seen through Schirmir and Lockman (2001), teachers instructed students on how to conduct the five-finger test; using this test, students selected a book, turned to a page of text in the middle of it, and either held up or put down one finger for each time they came across a word they did not know. If, before students finished the page, they had all five fingers up or down, they could conclude that the book was too difficult for them (Schirmir & Lockman, 2001). In place of or in addition to this test, teachers provided students with independent reading rubrics that they used when self-selecting books. With the independent reading rubrics described by Schirmir and Lockman (2001), students read a page at the beginning of the book and were asked to take into account a plethora of readability factors (like vocabulary, sentences, clarity). They checked off boxes according to the score most appropriate for each factor when doing so, then totaled the scores together and used a provided conversion scale to figure out if the book was appropriate for them to read on their own (Schirmir & Lockman, 2001). By providing students with these sorts of tools, Sanden (2012) claimed that teachers are still able to monitor students' choices for independent reading on some level and ensure that they are selecting books that are neither too easy nor too difficult. In doing this, teachers prevent students barring themselves from the reading gains they may experience when reading appropriate books (Sanden, 2012).

Other ways in which there was emphasis placed on teachers meeting the varying needs of students involved providing them with access to an assortment of materials for independent reading. Since not all students had such access on their own, teachers (like Lee, 2011) who implemented independent reading did not require students to bring materials from home to read; materials were provided *to* students. Teachers had on hand (through their classroom or school

libraries) and were able to provide students with an array of materials that piqued their interests (whether that be in the form of magazines, young adult literature, or comics; Parr & Maguiness, 2005). Such teachers were also able to provide students with access to materials appropriate to and geared toward their specialized learning needs; for instance, Kasten and Wilfong (2005) provided students with audiobooks/tape recordings and with materials that varied in reading level, Lexile score, and of which were high-interest with low-readability for those who faced difficulties with reading.

Another factor that was considered when teachers started an independent reading program in their classroom was the timeframe and consistency in which it was going to be employed. For some teachers that participated in Parr and Maguiness's study (2005), they allocated twenty minutes a day. However, others set aside the following timeframes: ten to thirty minutes daily; time two to three times per week; time once a week; and time only after students finished instruction and/or assigned work (Worthy et al., 1998). There were even some teachers who initially started off their programs with short timeframes and/or time once a week but then chose to slowly increase the allocated time as the program progressed and became accepted more readily by students (Lee, 2011). Ultimately though, as cited in Lee's article (2011), fifteen to thirty minutes of *daily* independent reading was ideal–this daily time was said to instill the practice of reading in students more successfully than programs that established reading for only a set amount of weeks as it established a prolonged habit with students.

As mentioned earlier, established independent reading programs can often be thought of and imagined as entirely quiet. However, according to existing literature, that was not necessarily always the case. There was indeed noise during independent reading time–that noise though was book related, purposeful, and did not distract others from their own reading endeavors (Sanden, 2012; Lee, 2011). Such noise took on many forms. It happened individually, with partners/small groups, with the teacher, and even with the whole class. In Sanden's (2012) article, it looked like students reading aloud to themselves quietly or discussing items of interest in their books with a peer. It involved discussion amongst peers wherein they shared books with one another or had post reading discussions (Kasten & Wilfong, 2005; Sanden, 2012). Furthermore, as described by Parr and Maguiness's (2005), it encompassed teachers asking students about the current books they were reading, how they came to either accept or reject certain books, and/or about their overall reading experiences. These sorts of noise were used to encourage students to participate in independent reading as it has been reported that "student talk is a primary way that students become motivated to read" (Kasten & Wilfong, 2005). For instance, it was discovered that students in Kasten and Wilfong's (2005)

study enjoyed hearing about new books from their peers so much so that students wanted to be able to engage with individuals outside of the set groups they were put in for discussion so they could be exposed to even more books. In addition, noise (i.e., discussion) during independent reading allowed for teachers to understand their students better as readers. Teacher-student conversations specifically led teachers to understand students' reading identities. It led teachers to understand what motivated their students to read, how their students selected their books (they found it was more complex than they thought), and their students' true reading identities. Many teachers even discovered through conversation that students they deemed reluctant readers were actually readers at home (Parr & Maguiness, 2005). In short, allowing various forms of noise (i.e., discussion) during independent reading promoted reading more than detracted from it as would initially be assumed by many individuals.

As teachers determined the above described criteria when implementing an independent reading program, they also figured out what accountability measures they would have in place. According to Lee (2011), successful programs did not include activities that demonstrated to students that they were required to complete a task or show growth in some way. However, rather than just allowing students to read for enjoyment, teachers, especially in Sanden's (2012) article, often still chose to include such measures as a way of ensuring that students were being kept actively engaged in their reading. Given that, the sort of accountability measures that teachers put into place included more traditional forms like reading logs, written responses and summaries, and conversations (either through one-on-one conferences or group discussions; Sanden, 2012). Students often dreaded and complained about these types of activities though, so some alternative measures that teachers employed included: students turning to a partner within the last few minutes of the allocated reading time; students sharing their favorite parts of their books aloud to the class; and more fun projects/activities like creating advertisements or songs about their books (Worthy et al., 1998; Lee, 2011).

Lastly, when it came to implementing an independent reading program, there was emphasis placed on the modeling and mentoring role that teachers played for their students. While students were reading, teachers deemed it important to showcase to students what enjoyment in reading looks like–Worthy et al. (1998) unveiled that they did so by reading alongside their students and setting an example for them. They also exhibited interest in what their students were reading–what series, genres, and/or authors they engaged with; they discussed books with students, going to such lengths as recommending materials to students based on what they knew about their interests, reading books their students enjoyed, and asking for and following students' personal

book recommendations to them (Worthy et al., 1998). The modeling and mentoring role that a teacher played during independent reading, however, did not just extend to those students who were already deemed readers and who were consistently actively engaged. It also spanned to those students who were reluctant; it involved teachers meeting individually to talk with those experiencing troubles and inquiring about why certain students were *not* reading while finding ways to encourage them and provide them with the support they needed (Lee, 2011). For instance, in Lee's article (2011), as a mentor, she engaged with a student who never read by asking what they were interested in and by continuing to push for an answer until the student offered up information. Lee (2011) then used that information to find a book geared toward the student as an individual, and the student ended up reading that book each day afterward thanks to the mentor role Lee fulfilled. Ultimately, according to Worthy et al. (1998), teacher modeling and mentoring during independent reading was reported to be more effective in getting students to read than was regularly nagging them about their engagement.

In conclusion, there was no one-size-fits-all approach to implementing an independent reading program in one's classroom. However, through my research, successful programs appeared to pay attention to and address each of the following criteria: (a) student choice; (b) attention to student needs; (c) consistent time; (d) discussion; (e) accountability measures; and (f) teacher modeling and mentoring. When these criteria were addressed thoroughly and with intent, students were more motivated to read and see themselves as readers.

Methodology

As a means of furthering my understanding and abilities as a secondary education English teacher, I conducted a self-study during my student teaching experience. My research was aimed at finding out and implementing ways to engage high school-level students with independent reading. In this study, I investigated the following questions: *How does my implementation of daily independent reading time impact students' perceptions on reading? In what ways can I create an environment that is conducive to independent reading?*

The thirty-two students included in this study were a combination of freshmen and sophomores from a small, rural town in Central Illinois. The students were participants enrolled in and spread across three general education classrooms. None of the students in this study had individualized education plans (IEPs) or 504 plans for which I had to make accommodations or modifications for. However, some of the students in this study were informally designated as honors or advanced students (i.e., freshmen who were enrolled in

sophomore-level English sections). In addition, there were two foreign exchange students enrolled in the classes at the time. All students had regular access to the high school's library and had experience reading books of their own choosing. For this study, the students participated in twenty minutes of daily allotted independent reading time and were familiar with the expectations of what that time should look like. In my study, independent reading time was designated at the start of each class section and students were expected to read silently the entire time. During this time, students were allowed to visit the library if they needed a new book and were allowed to work on any independent reading time-based assignments that may have been due. Students were allowed as well to sit where they felt comfortable in the classroom during this part of the class—students were permitted to sit at their assigned desks, on the floor, or in the flexible seating options placed around the room as long as they stayed focused. Each day, a different group of students (placed on a rotation) were given the opportunity to read out in the library if they preferred as well.

The data collected during this study included the following: student work sample, student anecdotal records, and field notes. *Student work samples* were collected on various assignments given in conjunction with independent reading. Samples were taken from the reading interest surveys and reading logs that students completed throughout the study's entirety. These assignments were provided not only as ways to gauge their interactions with self-chosen books and reading but also to hold students accountable for their reading. The *student anecdotal records* were collected on thirteen students spread across the three different classes included in this study. These anecdotal records served as a way for me to record specific student choices, behaviors, and reactions during independent reading time as well as specific instances in which students were heavily engaged with independent reading and/or were aided by me in some way to get engaged. Lastly, the *field notes* were taken multiple times throughout the duration of the study to note classroom behavior and reactions to rules/expectations during the allotted independent reading time. These written records allowed me to critically examine whether what I was doing as a teacher to facilitate independent reading was working or not. It should be noted that, in this paper, any student names used in association with these types of data are pseudonyms.

To draw conclusions from my study, I used primarily student anecdotal records and field notes. I compiled scholarly articles and literature to highlight the preexisting conversation around my research as well. The theoretical frameworks for my research dealt with engagement theory though I specifically used Jabari's (2013) concept of match and mismatch wherein content is aligned with students' identities, interests, learning styles, etc. to boost their engagement. Through

allowing students to do such things as choose their own books based on their interests and needs, sit where they wanted to and/or liked, read in the mediums that they preferred, discuss their books with peers and myself, and be rewarded for reading, I engaged students on multiple levels through this framework; I attempted to gear (and thus match) my independent reading program to my students as individuals.

Ultimately, to answer my research questions, I thematically analyzed the above mentioned various sets of classroom data I gathered. I analyzed them thematically according to five themes: (1) reading attitudes, (2) participation, (3) accountability, (4) motivation, and (5) student choice. Reading attitudes focused on both positive and negative ones that my students harbored, participation included such instances as when students were focused on their reading or associated assignments and when they were having self-initiated discussions, and accountability dealt with such elements as the measures I implemented to ensure students were staying on task with their reading (e.g., reading logs, teacher redirection attempts). Meanwhile, motivation encompassed specific components of independent reading that either encouraged or discouraged students from their reading (e.g., a book aligning with their interests, struggling to find a book), and student choice focused on individual choices in books, seating, and reading mediums. Results gleaned from this thematic analysis are discussed in further depth in the sections below.

Results and Data Analysis

Students' Initial Perceptions about Reading

Before implementing daily independent reading into the classroom where I student taught, students were asked to fill out reading surveys. These surveys asked students to provide information about the following: their opinions on reading; if they read at home for fun; genres that interested them; specific books they read previously and liked; descriptors for books that they liked reading; and how many pages they could read in a week. I ended up collecting twenty-nine reading surveys from the thirty-two participating students in this study.

From this initial reading survey, I noticed that some students (7, or 24%) enjoyed reading, some students (6, or 25%) did not like reading that much or at all, and that a majority of students (16, or 55%) liked it occasionally. Reasons for why they did or did not like reading varied from student to student. Aubrey, who liked reading, explained that she liked it because it "is a good way to get [her] mind off things and relax" while Maeve stated similarly that "it's a good pastime." Two other students who liked reading as well, Melanie and McKenna, explained, respectively, that they liked it because "it's like everything around [her] disappears" and that it is "an escape from reality." However, McKenna cited her

being “a fast reader” as a reason for why she liked the activity as well. Students that did not like reading, on the other hand, centered their explanations around reading being boring and the personal difficulties they faced with the task. For example, Kendall explained that it is “[h]ard to find good books [and h]ard for [her] to focus” while Joanna stated that “it’s hard for [her] to remember” and Aria said, “[she is] too slow of a reader.” Ultimately, these findings confirm what Allred and Cena (2020), Strommen and Mates (2004), and Bintz (1993) had to say about the impact self-concept and value has on individuals’ attitudes toward reading. The students in my study who had either higher self-concepts (e.g., McKenna) or placed meaningful value on the act of reading (e.g., Aubrey, Maeve, and Melanie) demonstrated that they were more motivated to read and enjoyed doing so. Meanwhile, those students in my study who had lower self-concepts (e.g., Kendall and Aria) due to such reasons as their reading difficulties demonstrated that they were more easily turned away from reading.

Regarding the majority of students that liked reading occasionally (16, or 55%), I discovered that their attitudes toward reading tended to be more positive when they liked and were interested in the book that they were reading. They even appeared to be more motivated to read depending on the book. For example, Krissy stated, “I like to read if I like the book and if I am into it,” Hadley wrote, “I only enjoy reading when it’s a book I enjoy and when I find that book then I like to read,” and Sam said, “If I find a good book I like it but if I don’t like my book I won’t read a lot.” Multiple other students mirrored these sentiments when answering how they felt about reading. In addition, I found through this survey that most students (17, or 59%) only read for fun at home occasionally and that it mainly depended on the book that they were reading and if they enjoyed it. These findings from my research when combined directly confirm what Allred and Cena (2020) uncovered in the student interviews they conducted in their study–they concluded that students were more motivated to read when the books interested them and were not boring. It appears, then, that even my students were turned away from reading when the books did not align with who they were as individuals and what they liked. It is clear that my students tended to enjoy reading and were more engaged with the activity when the books *did* spark their interests. And, though I found that most students (17, or 59%) only read for fun at home occasionally through this survey, I discovered that 31% of participating students never read at home for fun and less than 1% did read at home for fun. My study’s percentages regarding this topic uphold the trending phenomenon that the NAEP highlighted–that the number of American students reading for their own pleasure has declined (Schaeffer, 2021). My research demonstrates that this issue is highly present among high school freshmen and sophomore students in the midwest.

The last finding I noticed through the reading surveys was that the genres my students were interested in and liked varied widely. Students were allowed to list multiple subjects that interested them on their surveys, so some responses come from the same student. In the end though, students' top genres according to the survey were romance with 11 responses, horror with 7 responses, realistic fiction with 6 responses, and fantasy with 6 responses as well. Other genres listed by students included fiction, sports fiction, mystery, science fiction, historical fiction, and books that had been adapted into TV shows or movies (e.g., *The Summer I Turned Pretty*). On the other hand, the genres least picked by students–all with 2 or less responses–were mythology, classic literature, crime fiction, autobiographies, war novels, and animal fiction. It is apparent that students' interests are wide-ranging in scope. However, when specifically considering and analyzing the fact that classic literature was a genre least picked by students (i.e., only picked by one student), my study's finding adds to Bintz's (1993) conclusion that students are not interested in teacher-assigned texts. Within the high school English curriculum, students are often required to read such books as *Of Mice and Men*, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, and *The Great Gatsby*, and it became clear through my students' reading survey responses that they are not interested at all in such materials. They do not readily gravitate towards the genre. Given this claim and that my students' interests were diverse, my study suggests that independent reading as a practice was beneficial for them since they could self-select and read books/genres that aligned closely with their interests and that they could legitimately enjoy (Kasten & Wilfong, 2005).

Simply put, my students' attitudes toward reading prior to my daily implementation of independent reading in the classroom varied widely. The reading survey revealed that there were indeed students who enjoyed reading and students who disliked it, but it primarily emphasized that many of the participating students were indifferent to reading as an activity. In addition, the reading survey pointed out that participating students' reading habits and their motivation were often directly impacted by the types of books they were reading and that the types of books they were interested in varied greatly. In other words, it highlighted that many students' reading habits outside of the classroom were entirely dependent on how interested they were in the book and/or how good it was and that each student's areas of interest differed, suggesting to me, as a teacher, that independent reading would benefit the students.

Student Behaviors During Independent Reading

While I was implementing independent reading into the classroom where I student taught, I regularly recorded field notes and anecdotal records regarding both class and student-specific behaviors. I specifically paid attention to students'

participation with reading as a class activity–primarily whether they were engaged with it or not. From these behavior-focused observations, I discovered the following.

A major finding of my research was that, during my implementation of independent reading, students had difficulty staying on task. Most times, students were distracted with each other. Students would talk to those around them, conversing with each other about non-English related topics rather than engaging silently with their books. For example, students would often talk about their plans, any extracurricular activities that they had after school (e.g., basketball games, volleyball practice), or gossip. Some students would whisper amongst themselves as well in an effort to conceal that they were off task for me as the teacher. In addition to choosing to talk rather than read, students distracted themselves from independent reading by wanting to work on other assignments. Students would compromise the independent reading time that I provided them when they felt it was necessary in order to do other classes' assignments, whether it was math homework or studying for a driver's education exam that they had coming up. If students were not distracted by one another or other assignments during the independent reading time, I recognized as well that they were being distracted by their phones. Some students hid their phones underneath the tables for discrete viewing or they hid them behind their books so that it appeared to me as a teacher as though they were actively engaged in their books when, in all actuality, they were not. This conclusion ultimately supports an observation cited by Krashen (2005) in which students appeared to be engaged with reading through a cursory glance but, when examined closely, actually were not. In other words, some of my students demonstrated behaviors in independent reading similar to the pair of students who were supposedly sharing a book but happened to be talking about their weekend plans (Krashen, 2005). In addition, this conclusion confirms Hairrell et al.'s (2010) finding that a majority of students did not stay on task during independent reading and that they were not engaged with the activity. My discovery however does not necessarily demonstrate that these students had difficulty staying focused for extended periods of time–rather, it demonstrates that some students may have trouble focusing on reading as an activity but not on other activities like talking, completing other homework assignments, or going on their phones.

Through my behavior-based field notes and anecdotal records, I also noticed that those students of mine who did have difficulty focusing distracted other students and, in some cases, disrupted the whole class. Across my three English classes, I made it clear to students throughout independent reading's implementation that they were supposed to come into the classroom, take their books out, and begin reading at the start of the block period each day. Despite

this, there were students who took a while and/or struggled to settle into the routine. For example, there were two students (in two different English classes), Hadley and Kate, who both got easily distracted by the friends that they were sitting around–they got caught up in pre-existing conversations that happened at their tables prior to the end of the passing period and carried them into the start of independent reading. In addition, there were numerous instances in which one of my classes was talkative at the start of the allocated independent reading time. In this class, there was one table of students in particular that took longer than the rest of the class to settle down. And, because of this, they often disrupted the other students sitting elsewhere in the classroom who were ready to read or already were, causing them to talk as well. This finding of my research demonstrates yet again that students were not engaged with the reading they were supposed to be doing during the provided time; some of my students spent much of their time talking or at least attempting to rather than focusing on their books (Hairrell et al., 2010). However, this finding negates the claim that disruptions to the independent reading time were due to the inability to focus for a long period of time or find materials to read–instead, my finding reveals that some students simply struggle to transition into independent reading (Fisher, 2004). In the instance of Hadley, she struggled transitioning from getting off the bus and walking around the school with her friends into independent reading. Meanwhile, Kate struggled with transitioning from the passing period after her lunch into the same activity. In both cases, these students quickly went from a social period into one that required them to be silent and focused on a singular task. The transition was hard for them to manage and it led them to take a while to settle down and caused them to disrupt those students around them.

Given the fact that most of my students had difficulty staying on task and got distracted easily (e.g., by talking, their phones), my research demonstrated that, during independent reading, teacher redirection was used consistently and was largely necessary. As a teacher, I regularly reiterated the expectations of the independent reading time to all of my classes. Most of my redirection and reminders dealt with the volume of the room and for students to use the time I was giving them wisely; I told students that the room was supposed to be quiet and that they needed to focus on their own books. However, I occasionally had to remind students to take out their books, put their phones away, and that I would move their seats if they could not handle where they were sitting, too. Most students promptly responded to this redirection and became focused on their reading. There were times where more intervention was needed on my part as the teacher though. For example, during the research period, there was a situation in which students continued to have their phones out despite my instructions to put them away. I ended up setting a bin on my desk and

requesting students come up and put their phone in the bin when I saw that it was out. There was another situation in which I had to split up a group of students who were focused on talking by sending them to different parts of the classroom and library. In both of these situations, I noticed that the students became focused just like their peers had become with my earlier redirection attempts. These actions that I took support ultimately challenge Hunt's (1971) claim that the "ideal model has each reader directing his own activities" (p. 27). As seen through my research, if students were left entirely to their own devices, they would be off task for the most part, engaging with other activities (e.g., talking, other classwork). For most students, reading would be pushed to the side entirely. And, thus, redirection and intervention on the end of the teacher were both largely and regularly needed in order to ensure that my students were engaged with the task and that the allocated time was being used effectively and in the way it was intended.

Despite all that demonstrates that students' behavior during independent reading is dismal, I did notice that some students appeared to enjoy and even asked for more independent reading time when they were invested in their books. For example, multiple times a student, Jane, noticeably reacted to her book when something shocking was happening–she gasped and turned to me to tell me about how good the book was or that she did not see something coming. She also asked me repeatedly for more time to read when I was beginning to transition to other parts of the class schedules. Another student, Kiara, who struggled to engage with independent reading for most of the semester and often disrupted the silent time, began to ask "Can I please just finish this chapter" and exclaiming "I have to keep reading, I can't stop" when she found books and a particular author–Colleen Hoover–that she really liked. Other students behaved similarly to Jane and Kiara when they got into their books as well. Such behaviors exhibited by my students when they found an element of reading that sparked their interest(s) leads my research to confirm once again that providing students the opportunity to read self-selected materials boosts the effort they expend on the act of reading (Pitcher et al., 2007). In other words, as seen through the two aforementioned examples, when students knew that they were interested in the book or some specific element of it (e.g., a suspenseful scene), they were more likely to take the time to read and want to continue doing so as well.

In summary, throughout the allocated independent reading time in the classroom where I student taught, students mainly demonstrated what can be considered negative behavior. They had trouble staying focused and often chose to engage with friends, other homework and their phones instead, which sometimes led to whole class disruptions. Due to these matters, teacher

redirection was needed regularly to keep students' behaviors in line and to ensure that active reading was happening. However, students' behaviors improved and became more positive when they found an "in" into reading–when they discovered a book or author that they enjoyed or when their books picked up pace and interest. It can be said then that students' behaviors with independent reading were influenced in some capacity by external factors (i.e., phones), teacher direction, and individual reading interest(s).

Holding Students Accountable for Reading

Although it is argued that successful independent reading programs do not include accompanying activities from students, I chose to include them in the reading program I implemented with my classes (Lee, 2011). My thought process in choosing to do this was, like many other teachers, to ensure that my students were actively engaged with their books and being held accountable for their reading (Sanden, 2012). As a means of doing so, I required students to complete more traditional assignments like reading logs and independent reading presentations alongside their reading throughout the program's duration (Sanden, 2012).

In my classes, reading logs were to be completed at the end of each week and they asked students to provide the title of their book, the author's name, how many pages they had read that week, and a short summary and review of their week's reading. These logs were created with the intent of tracking students' weekly progress through their books. Unlike with the frequency of the reading logs though, the independent reading presentations occurred only twice throughout the program's duration–one was assigned halfway through the semester and the other was assigned at the end of the semester, meaning students had to read at least two books throughout the program's entirety. Both of these accountability measures were made clear to students from the start of independent reading and students received constant reminders about them and time in class to complete them as well.

When it came to completing reading logs, students were provided at the end of the week an additional ten minutes on top of the daily twenty minutes of reading in order to fill in their logs. I walked around the classroom during this time to check to make sure students were on task. I observed that most students used this time as they were supposed to, filling in the proper entries for each week. A few students, however, distracted themselves with other work or by talking to their peers, and I had to remind them to open their reading logs and complete them during this given time. I noticed that the students who did fall behind on their reading log entries due to these factors often appeared to panic when independent reading presentation deadlines grew near. This is because, in order for students to receive a grade for their independent reading presentation(s), they had to have a completed reading log that demonstrated that they had finished their book. Since these students had not been using the provided time to fill in their logs, they often forgot what pages they read on what week and what exactly happened in their books at those times, so they did not know how to complete

their logs. These students ultimately had to create one long entry either starting from the point they left off on in their last entry till where they were currently or one that summarized the entire book. Riley was one of such students who ended up having to do this because she did not stay on top of her weekly logs in class even when I reminded her. For the first book she completed and did her presentation on, her reading log included an entry covering the entire book (see *Table 1*). However, with the second book she completed, there was a noticeable change in her work ethic and behavior. Her reading log included more consistent entries, demonstrating that she had learned from her first experience to use the time provided more efficiently and stay on track with the accompanying reading assignments (see *Table 2*).

Using at least 1-5 sentences–summarize and REVIEW what you read this week. What do you think of the book so far?
The book started with explaining who Josh is and how important he is to the entire family. Josh and Margot broke up, but Kitty didn't know. Kitty was upset because Josh didn't show up to her last regular swim meet and he promised he would. Lara Jean knew they broke up, though, because Margot told her. Margot is leaving for college and Kitty and Lara Jean slept in her room the night before she left. Lara Jean woke up and saw Margot and Josh fighting in the driveway. Margot flew off and went to Scotland. She won't be back until Christmas, so Lara Jean has to act as the older sister and mom because Margot moved away for a few months and their mom passed away. Lara Jean wrote 5 letters to 5 different boys she has loved before. Her sister Kitty finds those letters, when she finds them and sees the address on them she decides to mail them out because she was upset with Lara Jean. The next day, Lara Jean finds out that her private love letters get mailed out. Her childhood best friend A.K.A her older sister, Margot's ex-boyfriend was one of the 5 boys that had a love letter written to them. Before Margot and Josh got together, Lara Jean was in love with Josh. Lara Jean avoided Josh for as long as she could. Lara Jean needed to cover up her feelings for Josh before her sister found out. She started a fake relationship with Peter Kavinsky. Lara Jean and Kavinsky agree to pretend to date to make Lara Jean's crush, Josh, and Kavinsky's ex-girlfriend, Genevieve jealous. The fake relationship between Lara Jean and Peter Kavinsky starts to turn into something a little more real. After a little while, Peter Kavinsky and Lara Jean develop feelings for each other. The longer they're "together" and the more they hangout, they eventually navigate the complexities of their emotions and the challenges of maintaining the fake relationship. Margot eventually gets back home from her college in Scotland and realizes the feelings Lara Jean has for Josh. Kavinsky's ex-girlfriend, Genivieve, tries to ruin Lara Jean and Peter Kavinsky's relationship, which then causes doubts and insecurities between them. Lara Jean and Kavinsky have a falling out, and Lara Jean soon realizes that her feelings for Peter Kavinsky are real and it's time for her to let go of Josh. Lara Jean speaks to Peter Kavinsky and tells him how she feels about him, she confronts her feelings for Peter and apologizes for doubting their relationship. She admits her true feelings for him, and Peter and Lara Jean reconcile and decide to give their fake relationship a real chance. Lara Jean's love letters to all of the boy's she had loved before were finally revealed to the recipients, including Josh who was initially hurt, but he eventually understood why Lara Jean acted the way she did and why she did what she did. Lara Jean embraces her newfound love with Peter Kavinsky, now

confident in their relationship.

Table 1. Singular Entry from Riley's Reading Log for *To All the Boys I've Loved Before*

Using at least 1-5 sentences–summarize and REVIEW what you read this week. What do you think of the book so far?
Lara Jean was sitting in class and her mind was racing thinking about if she would get in or not. Her heart was pounding out of her chest. She was sure she was going to get into UVA, everybody else thought she would as well. She was waiting and waiting in class. All of a sudden, one of the students said that the emails had been sent out. The teacher told them not to open it, but everybody was so excited to see it, so they all ran to their bags and grabbed their phones. Lara Jean heard happy squeals and people celebrating because they got in. Lara Jean read the first part of her email and couldn't read the rest of it.
She didn't make it in. Lara Jean was very disappointed and walked out of the classroom to put her stuff in her locker because the bell rang. Her boyfriend, Peter Kavinsky walked up to her and asked if she got in with wide eyes and a happy look on his face. She just looked at him. She walked away trying not to cry in front of him. She was 200 steps away from her car, she knew as soon as she got to her car she could cry as much as she wanted to. When she eventually got to her car she just started balling her eyes out and headed home. Her entire family comforted her.

Table 2. Entries from Riley's Reading Log for *Always and Forever Lara Jean*

On the other hand, when it came to students completing their independent reading presentations, I did not see nearly as many students using the time like they were supposed to. There were no specific days in which I required students to work on their presentations like was designated for the reading logs. Rather, I made it known to students that they could spend the daily twenty minutes of independent reading time working on their presentations if they had finished their books; it became a flexible work time for them, allowing them to choose between reading or working on accompanying reading assignments. Because there were no set days for students to work on their presentations, I was also transparent with students about the presentations' due dates. I reiterated the due dates to them multiple times and they were posted on the agenda that was displayed at the front of the classroom. It was essentially up to students to balance their independent reading time depending on their progress as individuals. In other words, some students used the time to focus on finishing their books while others worked on their presentations or even moved onto reading another book. As the due dates for the independent reading presentations approached, I noticed that many students (unlike as seen with the reading logs) were not beginning work on them and some students were even complaining that they were not anywhere near done with their books. As a result, I let students know that they potentially needed to set goals for themselves to read outside of class and that they needed to begin to use the time given to read in class more wisely if they did not want to

read at home. I also discussed that the independent reading presentations were going to be entered into the grade book as summative assessments, so they were all required to complete them in order to receive credit for the class.

Whenever I discussed upcoming due dates, setting reading goals outside of the classroom, and about using the provided time more wisely, many students would groan. Some students stated that "if reading was so important, more time should be set aside" for it in class. I did notice though that after having these discussions and voicing these reminders about being held accountable, students' behaviors began to change in regard to reading and the accompanying assignments. They began to understand the seriousness of the allocated reading time–namely, I noticed that they began to read more efficiently and diligently when they knew a deadline was approaching. Many students no longer were preoccupied with their friends or other distractions (i.e., phones) and they balanced their time between finishing their books and crafting their presentations appropriately. By the time the due dates approached, most students had finished their books and completed their presentations on time. There were (as in any classroom) a few students whose presentations were incomplete and who needed to continue to use the reading time to finish them.

In short, my research demonstrated that many students do indeed dread these types of traditional accountability-based assignments (i.e., reading logs, book projects; Sanden, 2010). My students often procrastinated working on these assignments, needed to be redirected during class to work on them, and appeared to end up having to scramble to complete them. However, my research revealed that students did read more diligently when they knew a deadline was approaching. Thus, having these accountability measures or any type in place (though dreadful) provide a structure for students and let them know that independent reading should be taken seriously and when specifically it should.

Fostering Students' Motivation to Read Independently

Considering the fact that many of my students' had mixed feelings about reading and/or difficulty engaging with independent reading, I, as a teacher, had to implement ways in which I could foster their motivation to read so that they would engage with the implemented program. I attempted to do so throughout the entirety of the research period and in multiple ways. I primarily did so by providing necessary support, gamifying independent reading, and by providing students with alternative choice(s) throughout the duration of independent reading.

To start, I provided necessary support to students on a regular basis. At the school in which I student taught, classes were not constructed through ability grouping, meaning that I had students with varying levels of skills and needs in my three general education classes. Therefore, some students were already more encouraged to read based on their ability levels and thus their self-concepts while some other students were more hesitant to read and even turned off from the activity due to those same factors (i.e., Aria who said she is

"too slow of a reader" in her initial reading survey). Given the varying abilities and needs of my students, I naturally aided students when they needed or asked for my assistance. For example, I had three students–Sam, Aria and Easton–who brought up concerns about how slowly they were advancing through their books and that they read so slowly because they had difficulty staying focused on the written text. As a teacher, I found and offered these students audio books for them to listen to. The school had access to various audio books through a program called Axis360. However, if the books that they were reading were unavailable, I searched YouTube for audio versions that they could listen to and follow along with in their physical books. I checked up on these students after providing them with the audiobooks to see how they were doing and if it was helping them with their reading. Easton informed me that he found "the audiobook was helpful" and that it was allowing him to get through the book easier.

Along with providing access to audiobooks, I supported students by aiding in their comprehension. I offered techniques for students to use as they read their books as well as offered clarification on specific aspects of their books that they found confusing. Regarding the former, I provided students who were having difficulty recalling what happened in their books by offering them sticky notes so they could take notes as they read. I did this for Easton–he regularly used this technique and it helped him remember what he read from day to day. Regarding the latter, I often used this approach with the foreign exchange students that I had enrolled among my three classes because their English language acquisition was lower due to it being their second language. I recommended one of my foreign exchange students, Nathaniel, use a translation app to help him dissect confusing parts of the book in his own language and figure out words he did not recognize. However, I also provided him with further clarification on passages by rewording and rephrasing them while adding hand gestures so that he could understand them. While he was reading Gary Paulsen's *The River*, there was a specific instance where I even drew him a map of one of the main characters' treks because he was getting spatially confused and had a hard time following what was happening in the book. Each time Nathaniel received this help from me, he happily exclaimed "Ahhh, okay. I get it" and went back to his seat to proceed reading independently and more successfully.

In addition to providing these types of necessary support as a teacher, I also did so by recommending books to students who were struggling to find books that interested them. At the start of the semester, my book recommendations to such students were a bit shaky and based solely on what the students told me that they were looking for. With one student for instance, I recommended Stephen King's *Salem's Lot* because he told me that he was

looking for a horror novel. I had no other information to go off of though and the student ended up not enjoying the book and returning it to the library. As the semester progressed however and my relationships with the students grew deeper, my book recommendations were guided not only by what information the students gave me but also by what I began to know about them as individuals. For example, at one point during independent reading, a student named Bethany could not find any books that she liked at the library on her own. I stepped in and recommended Jennifer Niven's *All the Bright Places* to her due to knowing not only that she was looking for a romance book but also was heavily interested in mental health advocacy. The book was not directly available when I first recommended it to her as the library could not locate it, so she had to read a completely different book until the librarians could. Some days later, Bethany chose to return to the library and check the book out that I had recommended to her, illustrating that she was more interested in it than the one that she had on hand. Once she had made her way through a portion of the book, I checked in with her and asked her for her thoughts on it–she relayed that she was thoroughly enjoying the book so much that she was looking forward to watching the movie once she was finished with it. In gearing my recommendations specifically towards what individual students were looking for and interested both inside and outside the classroom, students in my classes were more likely and willing to truly consider and accept my book recommendations as a teacher. In addition, it appeared they were more likely to enjoy the books as well compared to when the books were ones they just took off the library shelves on a whim.

Through these various described forms of support, it can be concluded that, as a teacher, I addressed students' struggles with reading and impacted their self-concepts with reading essentially motivating them. Rather than continually face difficulties and become discouraged, my students understood that they could come to me and receive proper assistance to overcome their struggles. In receiving this assistance, these students persevered in their reading and continued on with their reading; their self-concepts were strengthened, leading them to read more readily (Allred and Cena, 2020). These actions on my part as the teacher also demonstrated the effectiveness that a teacher's mentoring role during independent reading can have and how that role aids in getting students to read (Worthy et al., 1998). The fact that some of my students readily accepted book recommendations from me as their teacher showcases that they respected my opinions as a reader and that they were willing to try them out themselves in order to get into the act of reading. This regularly provided support shown through the mentoring role also negated the argument made by Hairrell et al. (2010) that the time was not beneficial for students who faced difficulties since they did not receive the guidance they needed. Students in my

classes were given support that aligned with their specialized learning needs and provided one-on-one assistance when it was needed, regardless of what the circumstance was. No student was left to struggle in independent reading nor were they abandoned in their reading endeavors which motivated them to engage with the activity on a daily basis.

During independent reading, not only did I attempt to motivate students' intrinsically (i.e., by providing support and thus strengthening their self-concepts), I also attempted to motivate them extrinsically. My aim was to make reading more fun and appealing for the students, so I created an independent reading bingo activity for them to voluntarily complete. It was voluntary as it was an activity that asked them to spend time reading outside of the classroom. The independent reading bingo included prompts challenging students to read a hundred pages in a week, illustrate their favorite scene in their book, read in a homemade for 20 minutes and provide a picture as proof among many others (see *Figure 1* for more details).

When I first mentioned this activity to my students, I received mixed reactions. My students who were more avid readers, like Alison, reacted more positively, showing intrigue and approval of the activity by nodding their heads and saying "Oooh" aloud. Meanwhile, my students who were more reluctant readers showcased their disagreement by contesting the fact that the bingo was supposed to be completed on their own time and outside of class. When I told my students that they would be rewarded for their bingos though, they perked up. I informed them that I would reward them for their bingos by giving them candy bars–this got a lot of the students more interested in the activity and led them to ask a bunch of questions about how it worked, what candy bars they could choose, and how many bingos they could get. Since there would be a reward, some students did end up readily engaging with the activity–the first day many of them were focused on reading and devising a strategy so that they could complete the bingo. As days went on though, students appeared to forget about the activity and were no longer as engaged with it. However, some students maintained their interest and desire for the reward past that initial day. For example, Kiara (a student who was a reluctant reader much of the semester and regularly disrupted other students during the allocated time) was heavily engaged with the activity throughout the entirety of my independent reading program. In just a couple weeks of the activity's premiere, she made personal connections to her book, read a set amount of weekly pages on her own time, finished an entire book, made higher-level questions, and defined a new word while also using it in a proper sentence. She even ended up being the first student among the three classes to complete a bingo and was quite excited to put in her request to me for

a birthday cake Kit-Kat; she went on to complete a second bingo not long after as well.

In the end, I discovered that a majority of students did not engage with the independent reading bingo because it asked them to read outside of the classroom and they did not have time to do so (e.g., due to extracurricular activities) or they did not see the activity being worth it. For those students that did participate and engage with the independent reading bingo however, I noticed that many of them were reluctant readers throughout the duration of my research and the bingo gave them incentive to read. It provided them with a tangible item of value–a candy bar–that motivated them enough to read and complete any of the extra work (e.g., coming up with questions) listed on the bingo.

Read outside for 20 minutes (take a selfie for proof!)	Find a simile and metaphor in your book *OR* two of each.	Read in a cozy chair for 35 minutes (take a selfie for proof!)	Listen to an audiobook.	Read for 20 minutes, 5 days in a row.
Tell someone about your book. Give them a summary or a review.	Make a connection with the book to your own life.	Read for 1 hour.	Read about your book's author. Write a summary about what you learned.	Find a new word and look up its meaning. Use it in a sentence of your own.
Finish a book completely.	Read in a homemade fort for 20 minutes (take a selfie for proof!)	Free Space	Read 100 pages in one week.	Illustrate your favorite scene in the book.
Read 75 pages in one week.	Read for 30 minutes.	Create 3 higher level discussion questions about your book and answer them.	Summarize your favorite part of the book.	Rewrite the ending to your book.
Make a connection with the book to society and/or culture.	Create a fake social media profile for one of the main characters of your book.	Make a book recommendation to the class. Summarize the plot and state why you recommend it.	Read for 40 minutes in bed.	Read in a funny outfit for 20 minutes (take a selfie for proof!)

Figure 1. Independent Reading Bingo

These two findings regarding the independent reading bingo (though very different in outcome) highlight that the value students place on the act of reading and any adjacent activities, especially whether they are worthwhile, does indeed impact their motivation to complete them (Allred & Cena, 2020). It can be argued that this finding adds to Allred and Cena's (2020) notion about value and reading–it demonstrates that the placement of value determines participation and motivation to complete other activities as a part of an independent reading program as well, not just with the reading as a standalone activity. As previously mentioned, most students in my classes did not see reading outside of the classroom, taking up their own free time, and doing more work for the bingo as being worthwhile enough, especially just for them to receive a candy bar in return; they were not motivated to change their habits due to values they placed on reading and on the adjacent activity. However, those students who did participate with the bingo saw the reward as worthwhile and thus changed the value they had placed upon reading so that they could receive a candy bar.

The last way in which I attempted to motivate students to read during the allocated time was by allowing them choice in their reading environment. I did not confine students to their assigned seats for the twenty minutes of reading. Rather, they were allowed to spread out all over the classroom–they could sit at their normal seats, sit on the floor, or sit in the alternative seating available in the classroom (e.g., butterfly chairs). The classroom where I student taught had direct entry into the library so students were also given the opportunity to read out at the tables and in the various chairs in the library as well. Since I had to bounce back and forth from the classroom to the library to supervise students during independent reading, only a handful of students were provided the opportunity to do so on a rotating basis; students would clamor over this opportunity though, asking me when it would be their turn next. In providing these sorts of flexible seating, I observed that many of my students chose to sit out of their seats to read. They sat all around the room–all the alternative seating was taken up by individual students while other groups of students sat in corners or laid on their backs and/or stomachs on the floor in between the tables. And, for a majority of my students, being able to choose where they could sit in these ways positively impacted their reading. Two students, Riley and Hadley, struggled to focus whenever they sat in their assigned seats. They were oftentimes distracted by the friends who sat around them, regularly engaging in off-topic conversations about boys, extracurricular activities, and weekend plans. When they began to choose to read elsewhere further into the implementation of independent reading though, there was noticeable improvement in their reading behaviors. In choosing to read out in the library, they were no longer distracted by friends. Both of these students maintained focus while reading; they were quiet, read efficiently

and diligently, and did not goof around despite the fact that other students were in the library with them. It should be noted that this was not seen with all of my students. For a few of my students and one class of mine in particular, students were easily distracted regardless of their surrounding environment and they could not handle choosing where they sat during independent reading. As a teacher, I had to move individual seats to get students to focus and I even stopped allowing students in one of my classes the choice to read on the floor and in the library because they were taking advantage of it either by talking or hiding the fact that they were on their phones.

When it comes to providing choice in seating and environment, it can be concluded that selecting a proper, comfortable spot to read promotes positive behavioral changes with reading for most students. This finding thus provides evidence to demonstrate that Lee's (2011) strategy to implement flexible seating can be beneficial for students. It can motivate students to read and stay focused on the task at hand by eliminating certain external distractions (e.g., talking with friends). For those students who did not undergo positive behavioral changes due to flexible seating, my research merely helps confirm the validity behind Lee's (2011) choice to view such a choice as a privilege for students that can be revoked by a teacher if it is not being used wisely. In other words, this lack of behavioral change with reading due to their environment demonstrates that, for a minority of students, environment was not a motivating factor for them to read more diligently; rather, it was viewed as a way for them to potentially hide the fact that they were not reading and get away with it.

In providing these various types of support for students as well as flexible seating, I intrinsically motivated students to participate and persevere in their reading by engaging with not only their self-concepts but also their individualized needs. Regarding flexible seating though, it must be emphasized that its effectiveness is truly a toss up depending on the personalities of one's students or their classes. In comparison to these attempts to elicit students' intrinsic motivation, my attempts at boosting their extrinsic motivation–through the independent reading bingo–were not as effective; most students were not phased by this activity and did not see the value in partaking in it. Simply put, high school students appeared more likely to engage with independent reading when they were more intrinsically motivated rather than extrinsically motivated.

Conclusion and Implications

Through prior literature as well as an analysis of the data I collected during my student teaching experience, it can be concluded that providing high school students with personalized reading experiences can motivate them to read. When implementing independent reading, allowing such students choice (in the

books they choose to read, where they choose to read them, and the mediums in which they read them) as well as by offering personalized support may lead them to be more engaged as their reading experience becomes more aligned with who they are as individuals and more positive. However, it can also be concluded that, with independent reading in the high school classroom, teacher oversight is still largely necessary to ensure student engagement. Though the "ideal model [for independent reading] has each reader directing his own activities" throughout the allocated time, high school students may not be ready for such lofty responsibilities as they often became distracted and avoided the task of reading when allowed to self-regulate (Hunt, 1971, p. 27). Therefore, teacher supervision and redirection should be consistently prioritized during independent reading and measurements should be put into place in order to hold students accountable for the reading that they are doing.

It should be noted though that there were two limitations within this self-study. The first limitation was that I conducted a reading interest survey at the beginning of the research period but failed to conduct one at the end of the research period. Due to this missing reading survey, I was ultimately unable to compare and contrast students' initial and final perceptions towards reading so that I could fully answer the question of how my implementation of daily independent reading time impacts students' perceptions on reading. The other limitation was that the school in which I student taught and conducted this self-study implemented a standards-based grading system. With this grading system, students were only required to complete summative assessments in order to pass their classes, formative work was not graded, and there were no penalties for late work. It can be assumed that there may have been an impact on students' motivation to complete assignments that were not classified as summatives due to this grading system, ultimately hindering my ability to successfully implement more varied and formative versions of assessment in my independent reading program in order to hold students accountable.

With these conclusions and limitations noted, teachers can utilize this research to understand high school students' perceptions and behaviors in regard to independent reading and determine whether they would like to set aside instructional time to implement it into their own English language arts classrooms. They can also examine the strategies I used, as a teacher, to hold my students accountable and foster their motivation to read–they can see what strategies and actions worked well on my part and which ones fell short, demonstrating a need for improvement. Meanwhile, researchers choosing to examine independent reading can use what I have achieved in this paper as a starting point for their own endeavors. Going forward, when studying independent reading, researchers should conduct more in-depth reading surveys

throughout the entirety of an independent reading program's duration as a means of tracking and investigating how exactly students' attitudes and values towards reading change over time.

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